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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the educational and informational television programming provided by four major networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox. Assessed were 29 children's television programs during the 1995-1996 season. Programs were videotaped from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., a time frame when children are most likely to be in the viewing audience. A content analysis was conducted in which educational and prosocial programs which met the requirements of the Children's Television Act were counted. A 5-point scale was used to measure the degree of educational or prosocial television content in each program. No programs fell into both categories. Programs with scores of 4 or 5 were rated as those that met the requirements of the law and those with lower ratings did not. Results indicated that although CBS offered the most programs meeting the requirements of the Children's Television Act, followed by Fox, NBC, and ABC, there were no statistically significant differences among stations. The educational programs identified were Beakman's World, Really Wild Animals, and Reality Check on CBS; and It's Academic on NBC. The prosocial programs were Santa Bugito on CBS and Fudge on ABC. The majority of children's programs had little educational value. Except for CBS, the total time devoted to educational and prosocial programs was close to the 30-minute guideline used by the Federal Communications Commission for license renewal during 1992 to 1994. (KDFB)

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Educational and Prosocial Programming on Saturday Morning Television

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The Children's Television Act of 1990 requires broadcasters to provide educational and informational programming to young viewers. Since its passage, considerable controversy has emerged about: 1) the specific programming that meets that goal; and 2) the amount of time educational and informational programming should be broadcast (Kunkel & Canepa, 1994). Although FCC Chairman Reed Hundt recommended a minimum of 3 hours of educational programming per week by each network, network affiliates only had to submit 30 minutes per week of children's educational programming to renew their licenses from 1992-94 (Hundt, 1995).

The purpose of this study was to provide an independent assessment of the educational and informational television programming provided by four major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were children's television programs from the 4 major networks during the 1995/96 season. Television programs from these networks were videotaped from 7am-12:00pm on Saturday morning, a time frame when children are most likely to be in the viewing audience. Because many of the programs broadcast during this time frame are now adult news programs that children rarely watch, only the children's programs were examined.

The sample consisted of *It's Academic, Hang Time, Saved by the Bell, and California Dreams* for NBC; *The Adventures of Captain Planet, Free Willy, Fudge, School House Rock, Re-Boot, and Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show* for ABC; *Beakman's World, Really Wild Animals, Timon and Pumba, Aladdin, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Santo Bugito, Felix the Cat, Reality Check, and Mask* for CBS; and *Fantastic Four, X-men, Spiderman, The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, Where is Carmen San Diego?, Eed Strava*

Ganza, The Terrible Thunderlizards, Masked Rider, The Tick, Life with Louie, and Not Just News **for FOX.**

Procedure

A content analysis was conducted in which we counted educational and prosocial programming, but not short-form vignettes, as those that meet the requirements of the Children's Television Act. Educational programs were defined as those that teach cognitive skills and academic concepts, including language, math, science, and problem-solving skills. Prosocial programs were defined as those that present a nonviolent, moral message.

Scorers used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the degree of educational or prosocial television content in each program. The programs in this sample were either educational or prosocial; none fell in both categories. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 as "not at all," 2 as "somewhat," 3 as "moderately," 4 as "very," and 5 as "extremely" educational or prosocial. We rated programs with scores of 4 or 5 as those that met the law; programs

with lower scores did not. Interrater agreement was 87.5%.

RESULTS

In a Chi Square analysis, we compared the number of educational and prosocial programs offered by each network. As seen in Table 1, CBS offered the most programs

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Insert Table 1 about here

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meeting the requirements of the Children's Television Act, followed by FOX, NBC and ABC, but there were no significant differences among stations.

For CBS, the educational programs were ***Beakman's World, Really Wild Animals,*** and ***Reality Check; Santa Bugito*** was rated as prosocial. For Fox, ***Where is Carmen San Diego*** and ***Not Just the News*** were rated as educational. For NBC, ***It's Academic*** was rated as educational. For ABC, ***Fudge*** was rated as prosocial. The majority of children's television programs had little educational value.

As seen in Table 2, the total time devoted to educational

Insert Table 2 about here

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and prosocial programs was minimal. Except for CBS, the amounts correspond closely to the 30 minute guideline used by the FCC for license renewal during 1992-94. This pattern suggests that most networks broadcast only what is required of them.

DISCUSSION

Television has the potential to improve the academic achievements of students and to enhance their behaviors via exposure to educational and prosocial content. The Children's Television Act of 1990 was intended to harness this potential to improve the well being of our youth.

Six years after the law was passed, little has changed. On Saturday morning, quality children's programs across all 4 networks are broadcast for only 3 hours, and half of that programming is broadcast by CBS. In fact, CBS broadcast

more educational television programs than the other three network affiliates combined.

What has changed over the years is the kind of programming broadcast on Saturday morning. Specifically, the ABC and NBC affiliates broadcast a substantial amount of adult new programming on Saturday morning, a clear departure from earlier times when children's programs were bountiful during this time frame.

In the summer of 1996, the FCC increased the amount of educational and informational programming required of the network affiliates for license renewal. Beginning in the Fall of 1997, each network affiliate must broadcast a minimum of three hours of educational and informational programming each week (FCC, 1996). The data reported here suggest that such steps were necessary, or the merits of the Children's Television Act will never be realized.

Table 1

Number of Educational and Prosocial Television Children's Programs by Network Affiliate.

	Not Educational, or Prosocial	Educational or Prosocial
ABC	4	1 (*Fudge*)
NBC	3	1 (*It's Academic*)
CBS	5	4 (*Beakman's World*) (*Really Wild Animals*) (*Reality Check*) (*Santa Bugito*)
FOX	9	2 (*Not Just News*) (*Where is Carmen San Diego*)
TOTAL	22	8

The names of educational or prosocial children's television programs are presented in parentheses. The number of Saturday morning children's television programs varies by network because NBC and ABC broadcast adult news programs.

Table 2

Amount of Time for Educational and Prosocial Children's Television Programs by Network Affiliate.

	Not Educational, or Prosocial	Educational or Prosocial
ABC	1 hour, 31 min.	29 min.
NBC	1 hour, 2 min.	27 min.
CBS	2 hours, 16 min.	1 hour. 34 min.
FOX	2 hours, 52 min.	44 min.
TOTAL	7 hours, 41 min.	3 hours, 5 min.

Total Saturday morning broadcast times vary by network because NBC and ABC broadcast adult news programming during a substantial portion of Saturday morning.

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